

FRIGHT SAID FRED

'Nine, ten, never sleep again...' They tried to burn him, they tried to bury him. They even tried to wash him away with holy water. But Freddy the K is back in town for *The Final Nightmare* and this time he's coming right out of the television screen at you in eye-popping 3-D!

The very first 3-D movie to get a wide cinema release (in the early 1950s) promised viewers 'A lion in your lap! A lover in your arms!'. It was called *Bwana Devil* and was a very bad jungle adventure with stuffed lions and less action than a slow day at Madame Tussuads, but it made a pile of money because of its unique gimmick.

Since then there have been a great many

more pictures made in stereoscopic vision. You can always spot them when they are played 'flat' on television because the action continually stops so that somebody can throw something at the camera for no apparent reason. In a great many cases the people who made the movies concentrated so hard on finding things to throw at the camera that they completely forgot about the plot - which was tossed away in the first reel!

Now I have to say right up front that I'm not a big fan of 3-D. Every film I've ever seen in this process has given me a blinder of a headache. In fact quite the most painful experience I've ever had in a cinema was

back in the early 80s when I attended the 3-D London premiere of Andy Warhol's *Flesh For Frankenstein*. This was designed to be shown by two projectors simultaneously, but the projectionist got the alignment wrong and at half time the ice cream lady had to swap her Cornettos for Anadin.

3-D hasn't been tried very often on video, mainly because of the expense of manufacturing the glasses to go with the video cassettes. I seem to remember that *Electric Blue* had a 3-D release once, which had a few points worth checking out, and was worth getting your hands on, so to speak. There was also something called *The Four Dimensions Of Greta*, that guaranteed to give you two black eyes if you sat too close to the set...

And now we have the final *Elm Street* movie, optimistically entitled *Freddy's Dead*, which features an intriguing 3-D dream sequence that brings Freddy into your living room. This works quite well because there's not enough 3-D in the picture to make your temples start throbbing and consequently it has a lot more impact in the movie as a whole. Apparently the makers weren't too happy with the 3-D process. They found it a bit of a liability because it was so cumbersome and time-consuming, and using it meant that some of the best action moments had to be written out of the film's climax.

Robert Englund himself told me on a recent visit to London that, 'The original script had a sequence which was a bit like a rollercoaster ride through Freddy's brain, with a lot of things popping out at you. But because of the limitations of the process we had to cut down the amount of 3-D to what we thought were the most spectacular parts. Then, when the 3-D sequence was first screened, everybody agreed that it



This month sees the long-awaited video release of *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* - in the stereoscopic wonder of 3-D and 'Freddy Vision'. Will this add a new dimension to the further adventures of your favourite horror character, or will it just give you a headache? Allan Bryce investigates, and brings you a potted history of 3-D movies in the process...



wasn't exciting enough, so we went back and shot some additional shock elements to spice it up a little.'

At this point it might be useful to give you a layman's guide to how the 3-D process works. Now pay attention, kiddies. You perceive depth because each of your eyes views an object from a slightly different angle. Look at any near object and alternately open and close each eye. You will see the object shift back and forth, representing the difference between your right-eye and left-eye views. Your brain puts these images together, and based on the degree of separation calculates the depth of what you see. Still with me?

3-D cameras film right-eye and left-eye views simultaneously by placing their lenses about two and a half inches apart, approximating the separation between our eyes, which is called the interocular and interaxial distance. These views are then projected and viewed selectively by each eye with the use of either coloured or polarised

quality of the 3-D effect. So there you have it.

When you're settling down to watch a 3-D movie in the cinema, it is not advisable to sit in a balcony or at extreme angles to the screen. Also, avoid the first few rows of seats. Silver screens focus their light more than conventional movie screens do, and don't throw much light to the sides or top. Best stereoscopic effect can be appreciated if you seat yourself in the middle of the cinema and towards the rear.

Ironically, the history of 3-D photography actually predates the development of motion pictures. Stereoscopes were common in homes in the 19th century, enabling pairs of still photographs to be viewed in 3D. Around 1890, entrepreneur William Friese Green experimented with projecting images side-by-side for viewing by audiences equipped with special glasses, but such a system proved financially impractical.

The earliest recorded public demonstration of 3-D movies took place on June 10th,

images were projected alternately using two separate (interlocked) projectors. It worked, but the system proved too costly to install in cinemas and was abandoned.

The following decade saw more improvements in the field of 3-D photography, most notably the introduction of cheap polarising material for use in camera filters. Much of the most valuable experimenting was done in Russia, where a special theatre was constructed (in Moscow) to show 3-D pictures. The theatre's screen was composed of thin, alternately angled, vertical strips, which reflected the simultaneously-projected right eye/left-eye stereo images into the correct eyes of viewers seated in uniquely positioned viewing zones.

Hollywood discovered the 3-D process in the early 50s, at a time when the movies were going all out to fend off the threat of the burgeoning new entertainment medium of television. The first producer to exploit the potential of 3-D was a radio scriptwriter



filters. The degree of separation in the projected images creates the illusion of depth. Simple, really...

Like our eyes, the lenses of the 3-D camera are angled towards each other to converge and focus on a subject. The angle and depth at which the lenses converge is a variable that must be decided for each scene photographed, and is called setting the convergence. This crucial alignment during photography determines the relative depth at which objects will appear in the scene when projected, and makes or breaks the

1915, in New York City, where scenes photographed in New York and New Jersey were projected to a bemused audience. The first 3-D feature film was *The Power Of Love*, made in 1922 by inventor Harry K. Fairall and exhibited in Los Angeles. Next came a modest science-fiction feature called *M.A.R.S.*, which told of a man who dreams that Martians teach him how to turn coal into diamonds and clay into gold. Directed by Roy William Neill and photographed by George Folsey, the film was presented in a process known as Televue, where stereo

named Arch Oboler. His poverty row jungle picture, *Bwana Devil* started the boom. It opened on June 18th, 1952 and quickly made back ten times its meagre cost, doing sensationally well despite bad reviews. The 3-D boom was now on, and over the next two years Hollywood would produce over 40 such movies, all polarised, and most in full colour.

The 3-D film that older audiences remember most fondly is *House Of Wax*, an atmospheric 1953 horror flick in which Vincent Price played the demented wax museum owner who cheats on the



production line by kidnapping young girls and covering them in wax. This film was a huge success, because its director, Andre de Toth understood 3-D and made wonderful use of the process. Ironically, he was one of the few people who couldn't appreciate what he had wrought: he was blind in one eye!

One of the most memorable 3-D images in *House Of Wax* had a showground barker knocking a paddle-ball into the faces of the audience. Of course all future stereoscopic productions had to contain scenes like this, even if they slowed the plot down a little. In many cases 3-D was used to bolster the box-office chances of movies that would otherwise have proven to be unmitigated disasters. *Robot Monster* (1953) and its co-feature *Cat Women Of The Moon* (1953) immediately come to mind in this respect.

Horror and science fiction were always the most popular 3-D movie subjects, with films like *The Mad Magician*, *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*, and *Phantom Of The Rue Morgue* being produced in the process. But 'quality' mainstream productions like Hitchcock's *Dial M For Murder* and the musical *Kiss Me Kate* also employed 3-D to good effect. The Hitchcock film in particular is considered by many to be unsurpassed in its clever use of stereo photography. But Hitch himself wasn't keen, calling the process, "A nine-days wonder" and going on to joke, "and I came in on the

ninth day."

The first 3-D boom ended as quickly as it had begun, eclipsed by the arrival of Cinemascope, the widescreen process developed by 20th Century Fox for their 1953 biblical epic, *The Robe*. But it came back in the 1960s in a series of low-budget horror movies like *The Mask* (1961), which featured 15 minutes of nightmarish dream sequences, superbly shot in a process called 'Depth Dimension'. Nowadays the film is more often seen 'flat' under the title of *Eyes Of Hell*.

Arch Oboler, the producer who started the 3-D craze back in the 50s, came back in 1966 with a movie called *The Bubble*. This boring science fiction thriller showcased Oboler's latest technical innovation, called 'Spacevision 4-D' which made 3-D filming easier and more economical. Oboler used a single camera, fitted with a sophisticated optical system that stacked the right-eye/left-eye views over each other on a single frame of film. Because of this, the system shot half the film of twin camera systems, making it the cheapest stereoscopic system yet developed. And it still gave me a headache!

Some of the more unusual movies produced in 3-D in recent years include a number of porn flicks but on the horror and science fiction front we've been treated to *Friday The 13th Part 3*, *The Flesh And Blood Show*, *Ape*, *Spacehunter*, *Rottweiler*,

and *Parasite*. We've even had a 3-D cartoon (*Starchaser - The Legend Of Orin*).

Virtually every one of these movies has claimed to offer some new kind of technical innovation that improves the 3-D process. But the truth is it's usually the same old bill of goods. In most cases 3-D is merely a gimmick, a tacked-on afterthought to help sell a bad movie. Whether this is true in the case of *Freddy's Dead*, I'll leave you to work out for yourself. Answers on a postcard to Mr Robert Englund, USA. In the meantime I'm off to raise my glasses. Pass the aspirin, please...

TOP TWENTY 3-D HITS

Here's a list of the most financially successful 3-D movies ever released.

JAWS 3-D (1983)
 FREDDY'S DEAD (1991)
 FRIDAY THE 13TH PART VIII (1982)
 THE STEWARDESSES (1970)
 HOUSE OF WAX (1953)
 COMIN' AT YA! (1981)
 ANDY WARHOL'S FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN (1974)
 HONDO (1953)
 CHARGE AT FEATHER RIVER (1953)
 MONEY FROM HOME (1954)
 THE FRENCH LINE (1954)
 MISS SADIE THOMPSON (1953)
 METALSTORM (1983)
 PARASITE (1982)
 DIAL M FOR MURDER (1954)
 KISS ME KATE (1953)
 SECOND CHANCE (1953)
 SANGAREE (1953)
 THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (1983)
 IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE (1953)